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Righteousness the Way to avert impending Judgments, and the certain Method to secure the Divine Protection.

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S E R M O N,

Preached in the Parish-Church of
St. MATTHEW, FRIDAY-STREET,
Upon FEBRUARY 11, 1757.

Being the Day appointed, by Proclamation, for a
GENERAL FAST and HUMILIATION before
ALMIGHTY GOD;

To be observed in the most devout and solemn Manner,
by sending up our Prayers and Supplications to the
Divine Majesty; for obtaining Pardon of our Sins,
and for averting those heavy Judgments, which our
manifold Provocations have most justly deserved;

And imploring the Divine Blessing and Protection upon his
Majesty's Arms by Sea and Land, and for restoring and
perpetuating Peace and Safety, and Prosperity to Himself
and to his Kingdoms.

By the Reverend Mr. SMITH,
Preacher of the Sunday Morning Lecture in the Parish-Church
of St. Gile's, Cripplegate, and lately one of the Curates of
St. Andrew Holbourn.

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TO THE
M A S T E R,
W A R D E N S,
A N D
COURT of ASSISTANTS,
OF THE
WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF
HABERDASHERS,

THIS DISCOURSE

Is, with all due Respect,

and unfeigned Regard,

Humbly inscribed,

By their most obliged, and

Most obedient Servant,

THOMAS SMITH.



PRO. XIV. 34.

*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but
sin is a reproach to any people.*

WHEN the benevolent author of our composition had formed man out of the dust, and made him in the image of his own eternity, he so strongly implanted in his mind a sense of religion, that it might seem intirely unnecessary to exhort rational beings to be religious, did there not appear a general neglect of, and an utter aversion to the practice of it. Beings that can reflect on the many present advantages and future blessings, which will accrue to them from a due regard to their reason and understanding, and taking care of their infinitely better and more durable part—Beings who have a law written in their hearts, and a faithful monitor in their breasts, which reproves them when they deviate from the practice of virtue, and applauds them in the exercise of every amiable and worthy action, were it not for that deluge of immorality and profaneness, which has broke in upon us,

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The first part of this sermon was preached before the Reverend Dr. Barton, in the parish church of St. Andrew, Holborn.

and like a mighty torrent seems to carry all before it.

Impiety abounds among all ranks and orders of men, to the great reproach of human nature, and to that dignity which was conferred upon it, by the divine munificence at the creation. (a) Men have basely degenerated from original rectitude, and so ignominiously depressed their intellectual faculties, by departing from the laws of reason, and allowing themselves in such a dissoluteness of life and manners, that multitudes pay no regard to things sacred or serious, nor make any difference between those that are holy, and those that are profane. lg

Thus does an indulgence in sin render men averse to that which is good, and gradually harden them in evil, by which means their understanding is blinded with unlawful objects, their reason perverted by the power of exorbitant appetites, their conscience deluded by the force of vicious habits, and what is infinitely worse, Religion, that bright representation of the Deity and the glorious perfection of our rational nature, is frequently prostituted to fordid purposes, and under colour

(a) The base degeneracy of Christians and their wicked lives, gave that worthy prelate Bp. *Kidder* occasion to say, that were a wise man to chuse his religion, by the lives of those who profess it, perhaps Christianity would be the last religion he would chuse. *Kidder* on the *Messiah*, vol. 3, page 38.

of sanctity is a cover for the greatest enormities and most flagrant hypocrisy.

When the intellectual faculty is dethroned and the passions govern the soul, and men have cast off all reverence for God; they can silence the voice of their inward reprovcr, and ridicule the divine nature and attributes; they can confidently play the wanton with death, and audaciously sport with that awful period, and solemn procedure of the last day.

When men are arrived to such a pitch of wickedness, there is nothing will restrain them from that which they ought to abhor; nor will any human means provoke them to love that which is good. They are so influenced by the detestable pleasures of vice, that evil actions are often applauded, and virtuous performances are treated with contempt; so that instead of abandoning the perishable enjoyments of sense, men swiftly pursue the way which leads to everlasting destruction. Let us endeavour to avoid the dreadful evil of sin, that it may not poison our affections, and that iniquity may not prove our eternal ruin.

Were proper methods diligently pursued, they would greatly prevent the spreading of wickedness, hinder its intoxicating pleasures from seizing our minds, and enable us to withstand all its alluring baits and overbearing solicitations. Since we are assured from

reason and revelation, that the constant exercise of our rational faculties, will help to preserve us from the infection of sin, and assist us against all its polluting qualities; we ought to employ those powers in repelling the force of temptations, and in getting a clear view of the sad effects which yielding to those temptations produce.

Were men sensible how much they degrade themselves, when they relinquish the noble entertainments of the mind for sensual delights, they would have such an abhorrence of sensuality, as would make them more assiduous to preserve the dignity of their nature, and to hold in the utmost detestation every thing that is vile, or unbecoming their moral character. The maintaining such an aversion to vice, will keep us upon our guard, and arm us against all its noxious insinuations.

A true idea of sin, with all its direful consequences will convince us, that no communities can be supported without the practice of justice and integrity; and that it will be impossible for any nation to maintain its honour and esteem in the world, when its credit and reputation for virtue and religion (b)

(b) We grant, a train of mischiefs oft proceed
 From superstitious rites and penal creeds;
 But view religion in her native charms,
 Dispersing blessings with indulgent arms:
 From her fair eyes what heavenly rays are spread,
 What blooming joys smile round her blissful head!

See Sir Ric. Blackmore, on the creation, book 1. p. 51.

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are lost. Nor must we expect the blessing of heaven upon our fleets and armies, or that any of our endeavours will be crowned with success, while the statutes of heaven are disregarded, and its sacred injunctions are neglected and blasphemed. Would intelligent beings acquire true greatness of mind, and render themselves proper objects of the divine care and compassion; they must obey the divine commands, nor suffer furious passions to usurp the power of reason, but use all possible means to keep those passions under its direction and government, otherwise we abuse our liberty, disturb the beautiful ordination of providence, and are subject to the assaults of raging appetites, which cause a domestick war in the soul, excite men to perpetual variance, and to war with one another.

By thus opposing the appointment of heaven, we pervert the wise ends of our creation, debase the dignity of our moral character, and are obnoxious to the displeasure of an incensed Deity. If men will leave the safe paths of virtue, to walk in the perilous ways of vice, be the event what it will; this they may be assured of, that the end of all such determinations will be confusion, and every evil work.

The only way to prevent the ruin of our country is, to observe those laws, which the great preserver of men has appointed and established for its defence and preservation;
for

for righteousness is an everlasting foundation, and the building erected upon it is such, as no changes or revolutions can shake or overturn.

Would reasonable beings obtain that happiness which is inseparably annexed to the exercise of virtue; they must avoid luxury and voluptuousness, because an excess of carnal pleasures makes the mind effeminate, enervates the faculties, and so habituates men to criminal indulgences, that they deprive themselves of all true satisfaction and enjoyment.

When men grow familiar with vice, they grow insensible of danger, and so regardless of those miseries which are the general attendants of debauched intercourses; that they presumptuously go on in their wickedness, and are wholly unconcerned about their chief felicity. Minds thus captivated by the deluding powers of iniquity, make no attempts to recover their primitive rectitude, nor use any methods to raise their affections above the beast (*c*). It's evident then that so long as sin reigns in the soul, and unruly passions claim the superiority of reason, they will engross our thoughts, and make us so intent upon gratifying illegal demands, that we shall run

(*c*) Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

POPE'S *Essay on Man*.

into

into the greatest excess of riot and extravagancy; the doing of which makes men despise rational delights, and puts them from the protection of Omnipotence; so that having forfeited almighty power and love, they can claim no succours of this divine being and irresistible defender.

Would we secure an interest in this powerful guardian, or would we raise our spiritual nature to its highest excellency, it must be by temperance and sobriety, by the exercise of justice and charity, and the keeping our frame pure of all filthy desires, that its beauty may not be sullied with acts of uncleanness, or any kind of wickedness whatsoever. When provision is only made for the flesh, and men use their abundance as instruments to lewdness; they consume their substance, keep alive inflamed appetites, by turning their riches into fuel for their lusts, and wasting their wealth upon insatiable and voracious passions. Let us beware of luxury and voluptuousness, and exert our best efforts to subdue sin in ourselves, and embrace every proper occasion to discourage and suppress sin in others, lest the practitioners in evil devices should spread their wicked inventions, and this excessive love of sensuality become epidemical. For luxury is the source of most evils, and the certain harbinger of destruction; it cherishes an indolent disposition, and lulls men into a fatal security; it ruins multitudes of families, and destroys whole provinces;

provinces ; it overthrows the thrones of the mighty, and tramples upon all their pride and glory.

Would we be a considerable people and have our kingdom flourishing, we must be clothed with the bright ornaments of truth and righteousness (*e*), and all the shining virtues of rational piety and undisguised devotion ; because righteousness, in the natural operations of things, will exalt a nation, but sin will be a reproach to any people. It is not all our boasted privileges, nor the excellency of our free constitution will make us renowned abroad, while virtue and religion are vilified and abused at home.

The way to wipe off the reproach of sin, and not to involve ourselves in national guilt, is by repentance and a national reformation ; for without repentance there can be no virtue, and consequently no deliverance from those evils which disgrace and oppress us. Therefore let us discover an indignation against sin, and principally aim at the destruction thereof. This will be a severe reprimand to the workers of iniquity, and the likeliest method to promote a general amendment.

To provoke you to this laudable work, I shall briefly lay before you some of the reign-

(*e*) By righteousness I do not understand the particular virtue of justice, but in a more general sense, as it contains every moral and religious duty.

ing vices of the age, which, if attentively viewed, will raise in virtuous minds the warmest resentment against sin, be a stronger inducement to obstruct iniquitous proceedings, and of infinite more force to bring delinquents to justice, than any arguments I can offer.

Altho' God is a being of perfect purity, and his unchangeable nature is essentially holy, which renders it impossible for him, who is the eternal standard of goodness, to be tinctured with the least mixture of evil, or to countenance such as allow themselves in impure and sinful gratifications; and though the observation of his laws is our only defence, and the certain way to secure his favour and protection; yet those laws are violently broken, every foul and brutish passion is indulged, and the plan of God's moral government is very little regarded.

Intemperance, uncleanness and diversions of all kinds are not only the entertainment of the great and powerful, but the lower class of mankind are not less criminal in neglecting the duties of their station, to pursue a slavish round of luscious vanities, and in appearance ambitious of nothing more than gratifying their appetites, and excelling each other in the most fashionable vices. The generality of both waste their valuable moments upon such pleasures, as greatly debase the dignity of the human soul, and act in such a manner, that it is impossible to know whether they be the

followers of the holy Jesus, or the disciples of some impure pagan deity.

Impiety has gained the ascendancy over men's reason, and they are so fond of indulging their vices, that even the Lord's day, which should be employed in praising their creator, and contemplating the mysterious operations of providence, and the amazing scheme of man's redemption, that their souls may be inflamed with true devotion, and inspired with the noble sentiments of virtue; yet those sublime and rational intentions are almost totally neglected, and the Lord's day is frequently spent in profaneness and in immoral pursuits; so that instead of adoring the merciful father of our spirits, and celebrating his power and wisdom, which are most beautifully and wonderfully displayed throughout the universe; this day is appointed by wicked libertines, for the more convenient gratifying their lusts, and taking a full draught of sensual enjoyment thereon (*d*). Nay, vast numbers of christians, to the great

(*d*) A learned judge made this observation, that the better he observed the Lord's day, the better his secular affairs prospered; however that be, this I will affirm, that the due performances of religious duties on this day will lessen our esteem for the world, and greatly increase our reverence for God: It will prepare the mind for spiritual and heavenly meditations, and cause men to pursue more steadily their temporal employments. I do not imagine that the sabbath day in itself is more holy than another, or that nature hath made any difference; but what I insist on is the business and work of the day, and the manner of doing it. This is what I lay the weight and stress upon.
reproach

reproach of the christian name, are so impious and profuse, that they often spend more on the first day of the week, than would afford them and their families a comfortable subsistence the other six. The minds of men are divested of true piety, and they have so little sense of devotion, that even the sanctuary will not restrain them from profaneness; and though it is peculiarly dedicated to the service of the Deity, yet the behaviour of many in the house of prayer is more fit for the stage or market than for that sacred place.

If we proceed to the duties towards our neighbour, we shall find so much deceit and injustice between man and man, as no candid mind can think on without horror, for justice is no longer looked upon as rendering to every man his just due, but rather an endeavour by fraud to keep off legal punishment, or a cautious method of oppressing others to avoid the severity of the law.

The doing to others, as we expect others should do to us, is almost banished our island, although this equitable regulation is the sum of the law and the prophets, the essential part of that religion which Christ and his apostles taught, and what all God's revelations to mankind tend ultimately to enforce and establish, yet this unexceptionable duty is very little regarded. Indeed it is sometimes coldly and indifferently talked of, but hardly ever practised. The love of self is so predominant,

minant in avaricious and rapacious minds, that they care not how unjustly and deceitfully they deal by others, to accomplish their own selfish and dishonest views.

The eternal and immutable laws of righteousness are degraded, and morality is become a name of reproach among christians, which makes it not to be wondered at, that dissimulation and hypocrisy, slander and detraction, malice and revenge, reign as much in the professors of christianity, as in those that are enemies and strangers to God's sacred covenant.

Mankind in general have little regard to justice; their spirits are so narrow and contracted, if they can but aggrandize themselves, they regard not how grievously they injure and oppress others. As for that noble spring of action, disinterested and diffusive benevolence, men have such an aversion to it, that they seldom are of any service to their fellow-creatures, but when their own interest is advanced and promoted thereby; and therefore we need not be surprized to see inhumanity and cruelty, extortion and oppression, lying and perjury prevail to such a degree, that men treat one another more like beasts of prey, than like creatures endowed with reason, and created in the bright and spotless image of our just and merciful redeemer.

In the streets of this great and populous city are exhibited the most shocking scenes of iniquity, at every by-recess are lewd
creatures

creatures of both sexes to catch the unwary and unthinking. I appeal to you who have children of your own, if any of yours should unhappily fall a prey to those human brutes, whether it would not deeply wound the heart of a tender father to find his son in the arms of a prostitute, and sensibly affect the bowels of an indulging mother to behold her daughter in the embraces of a villain, decoyed perhaps in an unguarded moment into those stews of uncleanness by wicked and deluding debauchees.

Iniquity so prevails, that it's highly probable there is not more consummate wickedness, or a greater number of complicated villainies under heaven, than in this nation of ours. The banks, which christianity has raised for the support of virtue, are broken down, and the overflowing of ungodliness has in a great measure destroyed both natural and revealed religion. Shall not I visit for these things, saith the Lord, and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this (e) ?

(e) The divine veracity is impeached, and the Deity is represented as an angry and revengeful being, who delights in the destruction of his creatures, and has previously to their existence irrevocably decreed them to eternal misery. When such sentiments are entertained, and men are taught that God is an arbitrary sovereign, it is no wonder that they deal by each other more like blood-thirsty inquisitors, who seek all opportunities to murder and destroy their own species, than like beings endowed with reason, and possessed with those amiable and godlike virtues, such as kindness and compassion, mercy and love.

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What species of vice can possibly be named which we have not, even that which nature abhors, and one would imagine could not be committed without offering violence to nature, and throwing the animal spirits into the utmost confusion; even this detestable and unnatural vice, it's greatly to be feared, is frequently practised, and is still daily increasing among us. Let us beware of this abomination, and exert our endeavours intirely to suppress it, lest we provoke the Lord to wrath, and to involve us in unextinguishable burning, as he did *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* with fire from heaven. But, O Lord, thy compassion fails not, and therefore we are not consumed.

* Where is there less reverence for God's majesty, or a more general contempt of his sacred

* I appeal to every sober deist, I mean those gentlemen which own the unchangeable relations of things, and the essential difference between good and evil, whether it be not high time to suppress the powers of iniquity, and that men exert their best faculties to support the interest of virtue and religion, since the advocates of immorality and prophaneness strike at the root of both. It appears by these attempts, that evil men are convinced it will be impossible to destroy virtue, without undermining of religion, which is the main support of virtue. Mr. *Hobbs* and some of his admirers affirm, that good and evil are arbitrary things, and depend upon the capricious humour of princes, and the established laws of kingdoms. I shall not enter into a metaphysical disquisition of things, or pretend nicely to adjust every particular circumstance of right and wrong. But I would ask such, as deny the essential difference of good and evil, whether they would have their wives and children,

or

sacred laws than in this kingdom? The proceedings of providence are arraigned, and its righteous and equitable commands are traduced and neglected. All laws both sacred and civil are openly defied, and the name of God is daily and hourly blasphemed in our streets, and prevarication and perjury abound in our courts of judicature.

The injunctions of our superiors are disregarded, and those in authority are most contumeliously treated. Men are so elated with pride and arrogance, that the meanest artificer imagines himself capable of directing the grand council of the nation, and that he is able to teach and instruct those in the cabinet. Our inestimable priviledges are most egregiously abused, and our liberties are turned into licentiousness, and our blessings are employed in supporting luxurious gratifications.

The overflowing bounties of heaven, which should be employed in promoting the divine

or their servants and domesticks, believe that murder and adultery, rapine and cruelty, are as eligible, as chastity and fidelity, justice and mercy. Should men believe such absurdities, they may as well decree that a poisonous plant may become wholesome, or that those things, which naturally tend to confusion and death, are the certain way to preserve us from disorder and destruction. See these wild notions admirably refuted in *Cumberland de leg. nat.* and in Dr. *Clark's* evidences of natural and revealed religion.

glory,

glory, and forwarding the peace and happiness of moral agents, are become poison to their souls, and the means of hardening refractory creatures in their iniquities. The laws of morality are subverted by visionary dreams; the free use of our reason is obstructed by uncontrollable indulgencies, and both public and private happiness are destroyed by our vices.

These destructive proceedings, in the natural order of causes and effects, will, if persisted in, unavoidably produce the greatest extremity and distress, turn the hand of providence against us, be our present ruin, and prove our future misery and final destruction. Turbulent spirits are so intent upon wicked projects, that to accomplish their diabolical schemes, neither wilful lying nor corrupt perjury will be any objection to them: if they can but compleat their mischievous views, they value not how miserable they make others, or what distraction and confusion they involve their country in. Certainly here is just cause for deep humiliation and repentance, and sufficient reason to use that pathetic and moving language which *Daniel* used when he confessed and mourned for his sins, and the sins of the people of Israel; O Lord the great and dreadful God, we have sinned, we have rebelled against thee, by departing from thy precepts. O Lord, righteousness belongeth

belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face. To our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God. Yet, O our God, incline thine ear and hear, open thine eyes and behold our desolation, for we do not present our supplications before thee, for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies; O Lord hear, O Lord forgive, O Lord hearken, and do not defer for thy own sake, for thy city and thy people that are called by thy name.

Thus I have laid before you some of the reigning vices of the age; and were there no other, these alone with all their aggravations and dreadful consequences, are sufficient to make us detest the degrading power of sin, and to form such resolutions in our minds, which if carried into execution, will engage us in the cause of virtue, and be the means of promoting a general reformation; and therefore gather yourselves together all ye that work righteousness, before the decree come forth, lest the Lord should say to the sword, go through the land, or lest he should rebuke with flames of fire; for by fire and sword will the Lord plead with all flesh, and the slain of the Lord shall be many.

It's evident from what has been said, and from the nature and reason of things, that the only way to avert impending judgments,

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and to recover the honour of our kingdom, is by returning to the practice of righteousness, and living in the fear and love of Almighty God.

In order to depress the ignominious powers of sin, and raise the reputation of our nation to its antient glory, that we may no longer be upbraided for our wickedness, parents may be vastly useful in promoting this important work, by inuring their children betimes to diligence and industry, warning them of the delusive snares which are laid to decoy them, and acquainting them with the misery that naturally results from sloth and idleness. This would fortify their minds against disobedient passions, be a means to prevent many noxious devices, and keep off all those evils that attend an indolent and slothful disposition. By thus exercising some commendable employment, and contemplating the purity of spiritual and divine objects; they will be preserved from that shameful confusion of soul, which is the necessary effect of sin, and which is greatly increased by the consciousness of guilt, when their reproachful deeds are detected and discovered. But supposing they should screen their evil actions from men, it will be impossible to conceal them from God, whose all-seeing eye observes the hidden springs and motions of the heart, and beholds the most artful designs and subtle contrivances thereof.

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To beget in the minds of youth a sense of these things, and that they are under the immediate and universal inspection of him who is privy to all their ways, and from whose boundless immensity none can flee; great care must be taken of their education, and all that have the instruction of young persons should principally regard their morals, and assiduously labour to make them sensible of right and wrong, that they may perceive the essential difference between moral good and evil; for when they are convinced of the debasing influence of vice, and the transcendent excellency of virtue, we may reasonably hope to see the beauty and comeliness of virtue admired and applauded, the foulness and deformity of vice abhorred and detested.

To imprint on their tender minds, the love of unchangeable goodness, and prevent their being seduced from the practice of it, they must be cautioned against relying upon a barren faith, and trusting to the mere form of external worship, without internal obedience to all God's commands; * be-

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cause

* Though every article of faith be agreeable to Christ's word, and every part of our worship be of divine institution and command, yet unless we answer the end of our faith and worship, which is a conformity to the invariable laws of righteousness, we shall never be qualified

cause no such faith or mode of worship will procure their admittance among the blessed spirits above, nor be of any service to them at that awful and decisive period, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and God shall finally judge the world in righteousness.

Masters of families may do much towards reviving a spirit of religion, and be greatly instrumental in preventing the calamities which threaten us, by restraining their servants from licentiousness, and reminding them of that bitter remorse and horror which generally follows evil communications, and refusing to obey the faithful dictates of reason and friendly reproofs of conscience. Had men a feeling sense of these things, they would see the obligations they are under to be virtuous, and the impossibility of acquiring either present peace, or avoiding future misery, without obedience to the divine laws of truth and righteousness, and universal submission to their equitable and unalterable decisions.

Would parents and masters have their admonitions properly affect the minds of those they have authority to reprove, they must see that their own lives be exemplary, and their

lified to appear before God, or fit for the eternal enjoyment of his glorious presence. No external garb of religion, as Archbishop *Tillotson* expresses it, will gain a man admission into heaven; there is no getting in there in a masquerade.

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behaviour in every respect be such as is worthy of imitation, otherwise their rebukes and instructions will lose much of their weight and efficacy. The observing minds of children, and those of riper years, are much more effectually taught by example, than by the most refined and sublime precepts of virtue, or the best and most instructive lessons of mere morality.

Parish officers, would they assiduously discharge their duty, and act with fidelity in their several districts, might greatly promote the interest of religion, and retard the progress of vice and profaneness. By virtue of their oath, they not only solemnly engage to present all such houses as use unlawful games and profane the Lord's Day by sports and pastimes, or any other profanation, or lewd practices; but they are also required to present every offender that is guilty of drunkenness, debauchery, uncleanness, and profane swearing, or any kind of wickedness whatsoever. If they know any in their respective parishes guilty of those atrocious crimes, and wilfully omit to bring such delinquents to justice, be their quality, rank, or circumstances what they will, they shamefully incur the horrid guilt of perjury.*

The civil magistrate may be of great advantage to morality and government, and

* See Mr. *Disney's* first essay.

the happiness of the community in general, by strictly regarding his oath, and proceeding against offenders according to the laws and customs of the realm: he is solemnly sworn to keep, or cause to be kept, all ordinances and statutes made for the quiet government of the people, and to convict and punish all persons acting contrary to any of them. By virtue of this solemn stipulation the magistrate becomes the guardian of the state, and in some sort the vicegerent of providence; and therefore by a vigorous exertion of his authority, and by exercising a discretionary power with honest and upright intentions, he will be a strong barrier against profaneness and immorality, check that dissoluteness which reigns among us, and greatly suppress the vices of a loose and debauched age. Were magistrates zealous to advance the public good, the workers of iniquity would be ashamed of their horrid practices, and religion and virtue necessarily retrieve their native strength and glory; for they are the ministers of God, and sent by him to punish them that do evil, and to reward and encourage them that do well.

I have now pointed out such methods as will, if duly prosecuted, obstruct the torrent of wickedness, be a means to reform a sinful people, and preserve future generations from the pollution of this. Let us instantly begin
this

this momentous work, and proceed in it with vigour and alacrity, lest by supine negligence, incorrigible offenders should pursue our destruction; and we for our remissness feel the severe chastisement of him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and out of whose mouth goeth a two edged sword.

If the several orders and degrees of men neglect their duty, and act repugnant to the wise and unalterable laws of providence, they must acknowledge that their calamities are owing to their negligence, and their running counter to the will of the supreme Lord and lawgiver. Would we compleat the work of reformation, we must strengthen ourselves by unity, leave off the discussion of unprofitable questions, guard against the warm management of unnecessary disputes, * and abandon bigotry and superstition, the

* The learned Dr. *Shuckford* hath given it as his opinion, that the *Chaldeans* were so zealous in their errors, even in *Abraham's* days, that they expelled him their country for acknowledging the one true God, and renouncing their superstitious notions. *Connexions*, &c. Vol. I. Book IV. Page 201. Thus early did the spirit of bigotry and persecution prevail; that implacable adversary to divine truth and righteousness, which has often made our rivers run with blood, and filled our noon-day seasons with darkness. This spirit hath often caused the best of our species, *i. e.* the friends to liberty and patriots of our country, to fall a sacrifice to its cruel resentment.

the grand obstacles to reason, and avowed enemies to truth and true religion, because the cherishing of such implacable adversaries will deprive us of that system of government, which protects us in the enjoyment of our civil rights, and secures to us the free exercise of our holy profession.

But should we delay this weighty business, and refuse to engage our active powers in its service, providence may interpose, and deprive us of those rulers which would help to accomplish it; or our sin may be like the sin of *Judah*, written as with a pen of iron, and engraven upon our hearts as with the point of a diamond; so that the evils we are embarrassed with, will grow more confirmed and obstinate, and the work of reforming a degenerate age much harder and more perplexing.

sentment. The pious bishop *Taylor* says, he could not expect but that God would some way or other punish christians, by reason of their pertinacious disputing of things unnecessary, undeterminable, and unprofitable; and for their hating and persecuting their brethren, (which should be as dear to them as their own lives) for not consenting to one another's follies and senseless vanities. *Epistle Ded.* to liberty of prophesying.

I heartily wish that worthy learned persons would, instead of reviving old controversies and undeterminable points in theology, use all possible means to suppress them, and employ their great abilities in cultivating virtue, and in the restoring of true practical religion.

These

These characters are certain indications of divine vengeance, which if they are not obliterated by sincere repentance, we have great reason to fear, that Omnipotence will soon overtake us, make us feel the bitter effects of our own folly, by employing his irresistible arm against us, and by executing the fierceness of his wrath in blood. Would we not fall a sacrifice to divine justice, let us seek for refuge in divine mercy, and gain a protection from that power, who is the sovereign preserver of the world, and in whom is infinitely greater safety, than in the most impregnable fortrefs. Place then thy confidence in God, and let the genuine fruits of righteousness appear in thy life. This will reflect a lustre upon thy moral character, and make thee participate of that immense goodness, which has been manifestly displayed in thy preservation, and in the preservation of many righteous kingdoms and states.

Should we refuse submission to the Supreme Being, or inflexibly dispute his authority, we are not so immoveably fixed, but he may pour down the vials of his wrath, and make us the standing monuments of his indignation. He may for our ingratitude and rebellion put the cup of trembling into our hands, and cause as great desolation in our age, as he ever did in lewd and luxurious ages heretofore.

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Wherever

Wherever vice and irreligion abound, the greatest armaments will be useless, or of little signification. No fortified towns or numerous garrisons, no naval force or mighty armies, *(b)* no degrees of wealth or commerce will support any nation under the heavy weight of sin. On the contrary, the most renowned kingdoms, the greatest empires, such as have been most illustrious for marks of honour, even

(b) The vast *Assyrian* empire, the capital of which was *Nineveh*, owed its ruin to the luxury of its Prince *Sardanapalus*. The *Babylonian* empire arose upon the fall of the *Assyrian*, and as it increased in wealth, so it increased in sensuality and voluptuousness, and its wealth, by being misemployed, proved its utter destruction. The *Persian* empire flourished after the overthrow of the *Babylonian*, and grew immensely rich, but it fell by unbounded licentiousness, and in time exceeded the *Babylonian* in those vices which brought on its destruction. *Herodotus* informs us, that the incentives to lewdness were beyond numbering. Historians observe, that after the *Romans* had lost their antient virtue, and were corrupted to the luxury of *Asia*, they did not enjoy their liberties for half a century. One would have imagined that *Alexander*, who conquered the vast army of *Persia*, by the advantage of well disciplined troops, and their being inured to war and accustomed to temperance; whereas those of *Darius* were so effeminated by superfluity, that thirty thousand *Macedonians* conquered six hundred thousand *Persians*. I say, one would have imagined that *Alexander* should have been in no danger of falling upon the rock, which had proved so fatal to *Darius*; but we find the contrary; for it is said by some, that he degenerated into luxury, fell a most reproachful sacrifice to his vices, and destroyed himself with the intoxicating sin of drunkenness. See *Littlebury's Herodotus*, *Echard's Roman History*, *Universal history*.

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those have had their changes and revolutions, are now sunk and totally dissolved.

These awful reflexions on the tragical effects of sin, and the folly of trespassing upon the rules of rectitude, should move us to temperance and sobriety, and to the exercise of every moral and religious duty; otherwise we can have no just reason to suppose, that God will suspend his judgments, or deal more favourably with us than with other nations, which have indulged luxury and voluptuousness.

Let us no longer abuse his merciful forbearance, who by various acts of his providence has often interposed on our behalf, lest we should provoke him, who is a mild and gracious father, to turn a severe and inexorable judge; for though he now exercises his attributes of mercy and love, yet there is an awful day coming, when he shall display his power and justice, in the righteous condemnation of all obstinate and impenitent aggressors.

Do not deceive yourselves, nor suffer any one else to deceive you; without purity of heart, and a conformity to the unchangeable constitution of things, no external signs of grief will render you acceptable to the Deity (*i*). Whatever men may substitute instead

(*i*) An eminent prelate justly observes, so long as sin and wickedness are not mere names, but real things,

stead of inherent righteousness, or offer by way of compounding with God, will never recommend them to his mercy, or qualify them for mansions in the sacred court of heaven. All our solemn fasts and set times of abstinence are but a formal mockery of God, if we are divested of compassion and love, and unwilling to redress the miseries of the injured and afflicted ; *for the fast, that I have chosen*, says God by the mouth of his prophet, *is it not too loose the bands of wickedness, and to undo heavy burthens, that the oppressed may go free? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and to bring the poor that are cast out of my house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and thou hide not thyself from thy own flesh.*

In vain do we flatter ourselves with peace, if we do not avoid the attractive snares of vice, and declare an irreconcilable war against the formidable powers thereof. The divine oracles inform us, that the *Ninivites* proclaimed a fast, at the preaching of *Jonah*; but had this people debauched them-

and have their immutable properties, let *Christ's* righteousness be ever so much imputed to us, yet so long as vice and wickedness remain in us, they will be evils, and such evils as will make us miserable, and be an eternal bar to our enjoyment of God. This we can no more hope to remedy by the imputation of another's righteousness, than a blind man can hope to see with the eyes of another, or than a crooked and deformed power can hope to be made straight and beautiful by the comeliness and uprightness of his friend. *Abp. Sharp's Ser. vol. 2. p. 180.*
 selves

selves with intemperance, or an infamous subjection to inordinate lusts, their bowing down the head and spreading sackcloth and ashes before the Lord would have been so disregarded by him, that he would have treated them and their superficial performances with the utmost derision. God has a prerogative to search our hearts; he sees us as we are, and no disguise will elude his penetrating eye; so that if we persist in covering our vices, we shall certainly die in our sins, and perish eternally in our iniquities.

See then that your inward intentions correspond with your outward profession; be persuaded to watchfulness over yourselves and your affections, that your hearts and lives may be formed by the rules of righteousness, and that moral improvement may be the end and aim of all your religious performances †; the doing of which will avert

† The duties delivered in the New Testament are little more than a republication of the original laws of nature in the state of innocence, which being by long time much obscured and defaced, were, by God's goodness, in a special revelation restored and brought to light. Its evident then, that the general design of christianity was not to make any alteration in moral duties, but to recommend and enforce them. See an excellent sermon on the love of our country by Dr. *Samuel Nichols* the present worthy master of the *Temple*. All sin is founded in the subversion of moral government, and therefore whatever tends to undermine the laws thereof, must of consequence destroy the essence of christianity, and bring this pure and holy religion into the utmost contempt.

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the avenging strokes of providence, and disappoint the devices of our restless and implacable adversaries; for when a man's ways please the Lord, he will make his enemies to be at peace with him, and his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks.

If Omnipotency engage on our behalf, though all the powers of the earth combine against us, yet with all their united force and strongest combinations, they will be never able to effect our destruction. Therefore do not trust to second causes, but let your thoughts ascend to God, the fountain of all existence, the first mover and efficient cause of all things, who superintends all affairs, and can without the help of his creatures rule all places of his dominion.

Nothing is more evident, than that the success of the most advised counsels and most industrious application, depends upon that over-ruling hand, which is the supreme director of all events, and orders all things with the most consummate power and wisdom.

(*) Suffer no violent passion to controul your reason, or be any hindrance to your making

(*) Reason, as an accurate writer expresses, is the grand measure of our being and actions; here lieth our highest excellence, our truest riches and most solid happiness. In the just exercise of this a man is a god to himself and others: neglecting this, we are only brutes in a different shape. By this we distinguish things,
examine

making an alliance with heaven: then will he who has the hearts of all men in his hand, and the disposal of all nature at his command, supply us with all things necessary to our happiness, or enable us to bear the greatest distresses with fortitude and courage; use your best efforts to secure a refuge in God, for out of him no absolute safety is to be had. The world we are in is decaying, and all things here are fluctuating; our present state of existence is very uncertain, and our continuance in it but of short duration.

examine their natures, discern our several relations to them, and the duties thence resulting. Whatever we invent or cultivate, all arts and sciences, all the conveniences and accommodations of life are managed by reason. This establisheth, connecteth and preserveth all the greater and lesser combinations of men for their mutual welfare: families, cities, kingdoms, religion, laws, decency, honour, commerce, friendship, every thing valuable, honest, commendable, stand firmly upon this and no other foundation: by this we contemplate the order, harmony and beauty of the various appearances in nature, open a prospect into worlds vastly remote; delineate and compute their motions, as they perform their rapid courses in the bosom of immense space: by this we raise our thoughts above the whole creation, to the first and best of beings, the father of the universe, the fountain of all existence and happiness; discover his perfections, imitate his rectitude, and find we are infinitely happy in so doing; by this we shoot our thoughts far beyond the bounds of this present life, conceive an endless duration in another world, and are animated to seek and hope for a felicity in the lofty regions of eternity. See an excellent tract, called motives to the good education of children, by an *Anon. Auth.*

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To conclude, many of us stand on the verge of life, and all are hastening a-pace to the grave. The king of terrors takes large strides towards us, and when he has executed his commission, we shall drop this body of organized clay, and enter into the unknown and untried regions of eternity. Fly immediately to thy all-sufficient Saviour before the lamp of life is extinguished, and be clothed with the unchangeable robes of righteousness; for if we neglect this important work till night closes the scene, there remains no hope of redemption. The pomp and splendor of the world will be of little signification, when we are struggling with the bitter agonies of death, and using all possible means to retard the fatal stroke. In those painful moments and awful seasons of distress, unless we are sustained by the powerful energy of divine grace, and the invigorating and celestial influences of religion, there is nothing will bear up our fainting spirits, or administer any consolation to our immortal souls. Let us endeavour to exalt virtue on its throne, and place our deceivable appetites under its direction; for if the deluding representations of sin are not rooted out of our hearts, images of horror will crowd in, and the terrors of guilt will occasion such distraction in our minds, as the most eloquent tongue will not be able sufficiently to describe. To prevent this dreadful conflict, let us leave the perplexing labyrinths of iniquity,
and

and keep in the straight path of divine truth and righteousness; then shall we walk with safety in this perilous state, and pass through all its vicissitudes with an holy triumph. Therefore put your trust in the Lord, yea people, and pour out your souls before him, for he is our hope: he will suffer no evil to touch us; in famine he will redeem us from death, and in war he will deliver us from the power of the sword.

I shall close this discourse with those excellent words of the son of Syrach, *Eccles. 5. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed: bumble thyself before thou be sick, and in the time of sins shew repentance:*

In whatever part of this discourse, mention is made of *religion*, I do not mean that which is taught in the corrupt church of *Rome*, nor that which is practised by some designing men among ourselves, who hold the form of godliness, while they deny the power thereof; but the *religion* that I mean, is that which is taught by Christ, and taken from its source, the holy scriptures. This *religion*, if stripped of the additions which policy or mistake have added to it, is most pure and holy in itself; is excellently well adapted to serve all the good ends of living in this world, and to support our hopes of living happily in the next: for all its precepts are pure and holy, and all its promises are divine and heavenly, and in every respect calculated to restore virtue, and to promote the rational and spiritual life; so that nothing is more evident,

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than

*repentance: let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows
in due time, and defer not till death to be justified.*

than *religion* does not consist in fine imaginations, or the entertaining of some curious speculations in the head; but that *religion* is a real thing, and that this divine principle has its seat and residence in the heart.

F I N I S.



*This Day is published, and sold by the Author at Mr. James's, a
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